THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

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PREFACE

Probably most prefaces are postscripts, and I may say at once that this one is no exception. Some who have seen this lecture in proof have suggested the question, Why should a Lecture given to the Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends lean in this direction? "It is all an appeal to the practice of the historic Church," writes one such reader, "whereas the Quaker differentia is, for the most part, an appeal against the historic Church, 'the apostasy,' in fact, to quote George Fox." I pass by the second clause here, and I admit the first, with a qualification; I appeal to the experience of the historic Church, and, if future readers of this lecture wish to know why, I will tell them.

George Fox, as I understand it, stood with the mystics generally for the possibility of immediate contact with God, and of direct knowledge of God by God's own communication. "I knew Him not, but by *Revelation,* as he, who hath the *Key,* did open." "I came to my knowledge of Eternal Life," wrote William Dewsbury, "not by the letter of scripture, nor

from hearing men speak of God, but by the Inspiration of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, who is worthy to open the seals." "God," says another, speaking of the early Friends, "has opened the Springs of the Great Deep, and overflowed their hearts, and they have seen and felt beyond demonstration and speech." [1]

Was this true, and what does it imply? John Faldo, replying to William Penn, says: "Your main fallacies are these two, from an *infallible* Spirit teaching, to the infallibility of the Subjects, in whom the Spirit dwells as a Teacher; And from the Spirit's *teaching* to its *immediate* and *peculiar* teaching." [2] Everyone who studies Mysticism will feel that real dangers are indicated here, and it was not left to the critics of the early Quakers to remark them. St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), a Spanish mystic of the Counter Reformation, has a most interesting passage. "I am terrified," he says, "by what passes among us in these days. Anyone who has barely begun to meditate, if he becomes conscious of these words during his self-recollection, pronounces them forthwith to be the work of God, and, considering them to be so, says, 'God has spoken to me,' or, 'I have

[1] These passages and others are grouped by my friend, Dr. Rufus M. Jones, in his introduction to Wm. C. Braithwaite's *Beginnings of Quakerism*, pp. xxxv., xxxvi.
[2] *Quakerism no Christianity* (1673). Part III., p. 20.

had an answer from God.' But it is not true; such an one has only been speaking to himself. Besides, the affection and desire for these words which men encourage, cause them to reply to themselves, and then to imagine that God has spoken.'' [1]

When the modern reader of books reads, in George Meredith's poem, ''Jump-to-Glory-Jane,'' the opening lines:—

> A revelation came on Jane,
> The widow of a labouring swain;

he is apt to feel that this is just the sort of person to whom a revelation would come—some one poor and ill-educated, lacking inhibition and nutrition, too, and limited in range of ideas. Professor William James wrote that, ''from the point of view of his nervous constitution, Fox was a psychopath or *détraqué* of the deepest dye.'' [2] Indeed, if Professor Woodbridge Riley's psychological study of Joseph Smith, Jun.,[3] the Mormon Prophet, is as sound as it is interesting, we may find ourselves told before long to class the two men together,—each conscious of peculiar inspiration—one hears, the other sees, both are honest and both pathological cases. ''Which is absurd.''

[1] Quoted by Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 329.
[2] *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 7.
[3] *The Founder of Mormonism* (published in 1903 by Mr. Heinemann).

Professor Lake is surely right in his forecast that the next great battlefield of the Christian Church (or one of them) is to be the subliminal consciousness, and he urges that we acquaint ourselves beforehand with the facts of psychology and with the facts of religion—adding that he means religion and not theology.[1]

What then of the Inner Light?

Now, I believe that any real light that comes to a man from God, directly or indirectly, will be confirmed by the light that comes to others from Him. God's lights are many; and, if I were allowed, I would find a parable of them in the lights of a railway station, many and confusing, if seen at a little distance, yet every one of them of value and significance, if a man will take the trouble to study them and to use them. It is for some such reason that I appeal to the experience of the historic Church. I believe in George Fox as a religious teacher, and not in Joseph Smith, Jun., because I am convinced that history is rational and relevant to ourselves. In every sphere of life progress has been made by use of past experience—in shipbuilding from the earliest dug-out to the *Olympic* and the *Mauretania*. In religion also the past is never irrelevant; it is a guiding series of lights, and it has to be prolonged.

[1] See passage quoted on p. 76.

To-day no study of origins is considered waste of time that is pursued in earnest; and we may fairly claim that to test our own ideas and instincts and experiences by those of other ages is, at the very least, what we call scientific; while in the practical conduct of life it may save us from false starts innumerable and help to set us on some sure path.

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The difficulties of the doctrine of Inward Guidance are, as James Nayler's experience reminds us, serious and practical. I would suggest that the solution lies in a deeper interpretation of the person and message of Jesus Christ. Apart from the thought of God as we see Him set forth in Jesus, and the common consciousness of truth as revealed in lofty souls who have been touched by His spiritual fire, it is not evident how the faults of individual interpretation are to be corrected. . . . With Jesus as the Gospel, witnessed in the conscience of a civilization infected by His Spirit, I see the balance-wheel to the doctrine of the Inward Light.

JOHN WILHELM ROWNTREE.

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

A GENERAL SURVEY OF THE SUBJECT

The subject before us to-day is the Nature and Purpose of a Christian Society. One such society will naturally be in all our thoughts, but after all there are many. Yet all surely are alike in many respects—they have one origin and they work for one end. We shall do better, perhaps, to look at the matter in a larger way and with a wider outlook—to look at the whole Christian Church, of which all other Christian groups and societies are parts, and endeavour to learn something of what it means.

We have to remember that we are dealing with an old story—there is no starting anew here. The foundation of every Christian society was laid long ago, and nineteen centuries of Christian life are not to be passed lightly by. Our great inheritance in the Christian Church affects all our thinking and all our action in

religious matters. Whatever we do with it, it is there. The first part of our study, then, will be given to reminiscence. We have to recall what the whole Church is and has been in its innermost essence, and for what it has stood and still stands, and to realise its value for ourselves at once as a guide to truth and a spiritual reinforcement in action. Its much-disputed "authority" we shall thus take in its proper sense—not as a title to impose belief upon us, but as a warrant to us to look for certain things with a strong expectation of finding them. "I have found reason," wrote Dr. Johnson, "to pay great regard to the voice of the people in cases where knowledge has been forced upon them by experience, without long deductions or deep researches." Our first task will be to try to find what the experience of the Christian Church means for us; and we shall have to make sure that we reach the heart of it.

In the second place, when once we have begun to realise the fact of the Christian Church, our task will be to look more closely at its origin. We know that it began in a great intimacy and under the impulse of a great friendship. We shall have to watch the first disciples in their intercourse with Jesus of Nazareth, if we are to understand, in any real way, why there

should be a Christian Church at all. If we find that He asked a certain attitude of mind from those who first followed Him, we shall take it that He asks as much of us; and if we discover something of what He gave to them, and of what He was to them, we shall expect that to us He will give no less and will be no less. Thus we may be better able to take in what is the part and place of the individual member of a Christian society, as one who is enlisted by Christ and who stands in a personal relation to Him.

Lastly we shall have to study the Christian Society rather as a community than as a collection of individuals—to grasp, if we can, how essential the common life and activity become, at once for our own fullest development and for the effective expression of those thoughts with which Christ inspires His followers; and to understand what is asked of us as members of a Christian society, fellow-workers for our Master and with Him, and face to face with the world's need of Him.

In all this I shall have to ask your patience and your co-operation. If Aristotle, in beginning his *Ethics,* warns his reader—or the listener to his lectures, whichever it was—that he must necessarily treat his subject "in outline and not with accurate elaboration" you will

understand how much more reason one has for such a plea when the scale of treatment is so much smaller, and when the theme is the Church of Christ.

I

THE INHERITANCE WE POSSESS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Whatever we make of it, the Christian Church stands out as one of the most significant factors in human society for nineteen centuries. It has seen civilisation overwhelmed, and it has seen it rise again, and been itself the centre about which it rose. Every phase of life is touched by some relation with the Church. All history is full of it. We cannot get away from it, however much we renounce it. But we are not thinking of renouncing it. We realise that it means more than we grasp; but what it means—all that it means—it is hard to understand.

For the story of the Church is not that of a body one and the same from its beginning onward. It is a story broken, interrupted, ramified—full of cross threads and unevennesses; there are forward movements and relapses; in devotion and piety, even in morality, there are records of incredible grandeur and of unintelli-

gible failure and dulness. It seems at times as if there is no history of the Church—it is a series of accidents and false starts—a campaign without a plan, armies flung here and there, out of touch with one another, often cut off from their base—confused fighting in which the soldiers of Christ seem as often as not to spend as much of their ammunition on the battalions advancing in parallels with them as on the enemy. Greek, Latin, Armenian, Copt, Syrian and Abyssinian all have their Catholic or Orthodox churches, while, in the West, Protestantism, if more energetic, wastes a large part of its energy in the complicated tangles of its own sub-divisions. When one surveys the Church and its history fairly and quietly, what *does* it mean? Or has confusion a meaning?

We turn back to the Founder of the Church, and we get a curious hint that He foresaw more or less what its story would be.

Sometimes He looked back to the fireside at Nazareth to find in commonplace incidents illustrations of the religious life, and few of the parables are so vivid as these. Among the parables of the home life that of the leaven is one of the shortest and most suggestive. It was Mary, we may believe, who put the leaven in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened, and Jesus sat by the fire and watched

it. In after years the sight came back to Him. He remembered the big basin, the heaving, panting mass in it, the bubbles struggling out, swelling and breaking, and the level rising and falling. It came to Him as a picture of the Kingdom of Heaven, at work in the individual man and in the community.

There were those who looked for the coming of the Kingdom in every bubble of every day, but it did not come. But He at least saw deeper, and by a simple illustration turned the attention of His friends from the bubble to the leaven, from the manifestation to the life; and then the manifestation ceased to be a mere meaningless bubble breaking in an instant, and became a pledge and proof of life, a thing of less meaning and of more meaning. It is the seething life within the mass that drives up the bubbles. They swell and strain; and then because the life behind them is too strong for them, they break. If it were not there, they might have what would be a long and quiet life for a bubble. But the breaking shows there is life at work behind them.

Let us keep this parable in mind, and look again at the story of the Church. We may begin with its names for Jesus.

The earlier Christians, starting from Jewish ideas, called Him Messiah. The name served

its day, and expressed for those who used it their conception of Jesus as God's Anointed, who restores all things, who sets all in place, and gives their own again to God's own in a new and permanent relation with God Himself. But for the Greek it was a foreign term and had little distinct meaning. It came to be virtually a proper name; and, if the idea of the Messiah survived, it was in a new sense, larger, more embracing—that is, not quite the old idea. It had in a sense broken under the stress of life. We can imagine that, by Jewish Christians, the quiet supersession of the great conception of their race by a Greek philosophical term would be realised with pain. What would the Greeks make of the Saviour? What did they mean by *Logos?* Or by all the other names and theories they flung out with such ease and ingenuity? What would be the outcome of all this unchartered freedom of speculation? Old and new ideas were already in conflict—the confusion had begun.

We to-day can see in the long series of the early heresies something more than was evident to those who first encountered them with pain. Each represents some attempt to find the place of Jesus in the world, as the world was conceived by the best thought available. It meant that Jesus was now the possession not of a

race nor of a sect, but of mankind. He belonged to humanity in earnest. "Under these fantastic Terrors of Sect and Schism," as Milton wrote of a later day, "we wrong the earnest and zealous Thirst after Knowledge and Understanding which God hath stirred up." For, as he says, "Opinion in good Men is but Knowledge in the making." Where a leaven so powerful came into human thought, the working was bound to be tempestuous; and the contribution of heresy to sound Christian thinking is not always fully recognised. The wrong view calls for its own correction, and the half-truth, fatal in itself, may yet be a new door opened upon truth. Fresh values were found in the familiar Jesus—new vistas of the future seen—and once gained they were never abandoned. Creed followed creed, each to be final; but men have not quickly reached finality in exploring Christ. A fresh pulsation of the life that comes from the Spirit of Jesus—and the impossible happens. The enormous disorders that accompanied the Reformation tell of the working of the leaven; and the immense lift forward of all humanity that also followed is proof positive (for those who will see) Whose was the life that stirred in that great movement.

The story of Christ's Church is that of the

three measures of meal. Each new bubble means some stirring of life, some manifestation of a new conquest by the spirit of life within, of a new province claimed for the Kingdom of God—till the whole be leavened. And for every bubble that breaks—creed or ecclesiastical system or society—there are those who mourn as if the Church itself were dead and done for. They are wrong. The life of the Church is not going to perish so long as its Founder lives and works. If one view after another of Jesus Christ and His work forces itself upon us, breaking through our old conceptions, keeping our minds open, our eyes and hearts alert and sensitive, and making us feel ever more vividly the fulness and variety and sufficiency of our Master—can we regret it? There is risk, of course. If men start thinking, they may think wrongly. If they gain some new realisation of Christ, they may lose one more vital. Thinking is as dangerous as living—as full of perils for individual and community; but the Church stands for life, and life takes care of itself wonderfully well.

"The Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His holy word." So Robinson of Leyden taught the Pilgrim Fathers three hundred years ago. The Church is one great society of

pilgrims, of many tongues and minds and communities, and all pilgrims seek a better country —a land of more light, more knowledge and more peace. If they straggle and lose their ways and cross each other's paths from every unexpected point of the compass, none the less all are marching in one loyalty. And loyalty has a wonderful gift of clearing the air and enlightening the eyes.

The Church Universal with all its confusions is our inheritance, and its confusions are a part of our inheritance; and if, instead of rejecting the Church because of its confusions, we study these, we are likely to find certain aspects of order emerge in the midst of the disorder. Some things will stand out clearly. For instance, in every age and land, whatever its confusions, the great Christian community has had the gift of producing a high and great type of character; and such a type surely implies an unsuspected unity. Again, when we study the immense and perplexing variety of opinion that has torn the Church into so many parties, it emerges that this variety arises from the uneven application of certain persistent ideas, held firmly, and in measure clearly, to a whole phantasmagoria of other opinions which are less central and which are held less securely.

Finally we shall see that the Church is, in all its divisions, at one on the Person and Authority of its Founder.

THE CHRISTIAN TYPE OF CHARACTER

It is quite true that by to-day to speak of the "Lives of the Saints" is to suggest to the ordinary mind lack-lustre records of anæmic and characterless lives, many of them, if not wholly legendary, still full of legend, misunderstanding and absurdity. There is no doubt a certain degree of truth in this prejudice, though perhaps not quite enough to absolve us from reading those lives which are not open to such a charge—an absolution which the Protestant Churches too readily grant to themselves. Moreover, a certain curious association of peace with our ideas of beauty has brought it about that, in spite of the conspicuous fact that many of the greatest saints have been men of intense energy, who did their work in lives of battle "not without dust and heat," still to men and women of nimble intelligence "saint" seems to connote some defect of vitality. This is a pity, because it is a beautiful word; but for the present we had better let it alone.

But if, for once, instead of a history of the Church, a history of Christian character could be written, by some one who combined a wide

range of interests and a full-blooded habit of mind with the quiet eye for character that sympathy gives, and the instinct that knows the Spirit of Jesus, the work might be one of extraordinary value. Here would appear every variety of nature, the strong and the tender, the man of action and the poet, the leader and the philosopher—all the types singly, and all in every conceivable combination—transformed and inspired in a new way, progressively and collectively moving forward, and advancing mankind with them towards the realisation of a larger and ampler humanity. And the gist of the story would not be some vague abstract noun—some theory of evolution; it would be a record of struggle against one influence, ending in surrender to it, and of a new life lived in the power of another; and that other would always be the same.

It is quite clear that as a rule to-day the Christian Church does not make the use of its past that it might. The study of the great Christian biographies—and especially the autobiographies—must inevitably bring out the strength of the Christian position, and reveal resources which we forget. Here are men and women very like ourselves—weak and strong, stubborn and uncertain, sceptical, timid, and in earnest about truth—set face to face to battle

with intellectual problems, with moral problems and social problems; and many of them begin with a misunderstanding or even a rejection of the master-thoughts of the Church. They will start anew, as we ourselves start anew, without reference to the past, to tradition and Christian phrase. They will live among facts; and then they find a pressure of facts upon them, which forces them step by step to realise that there is more in the Christian message than they supposed. The Church grows in significance for them, as it did for St. Augustine, for instance, when he realised the strength and happiness of the Christian people in contrast with his own disorder and wretchedness, and came to feel that there was a power behind the Church or within it, which his own life did not know.[1] That is the experience of many.

We do not enough value the fact that the story of the Christian religion is the story of personality influenced by personality—re-birth constantly the product of the influence of the re-born. There are cases of people converted to Christian belief and conduct without apparently any personal mediation; this man hears, as he puts it, "the voice of all Nature speaking to him," or becomes conscious, without any

[1] *Confessions* viii, 12, 27. The Church, *non dissolute hilaris*, points him to the victories of her children, and asks him why he too should not achieve them in Another's strength, as they did.

thought of Christ, that a new moral necessity is laid upon him; and, without thinking out exactly to whom he speaks, he says "If you will help me, I will"; another man finds a Bible or a tract by accident, and reads it and is changed. Even so, we find very often—perhaps always—that the former type of case has had a neglected Christian environment; that is certainly true of two instances I have in mind; while tract and Bible are conspicuously the work of Christian communities. Still, in general, Christian conviction is apt to begin in contact with Christian character. The blessing comes from a higher source, but the broken bread is given by human hands. If we study the history of the Church aright, we find that behind each one of us there reaches a long nexus of personality, each link in the chain a Christian man or woman, till we find ourselves abreast of the first disciples in the presence of their Master. Indeed, if we reflect how many Christian characters have contributed their influence to the growth and development of the Christian life in each one of us, we shall find, if we trace what might be called our Christian pedigree, that we are connected with Jesus Christ by a good many lines of descent, and that these cross and re-cross amazingly. This great complex of relations is the Church.

Historically and spiritually we are part of it, and it belongs to us. The question is, do we realise the force and availability of its influence? The value of its testimony as evidence to truth, when we reflect how that testimony has been evolved? The value of its stimulus to service and to sacrifice, when we weigh the psychology of the martyr in the Roman or the Chinese Empire, or of the missionary among the Goths or the Bechuanas? We forget that to *know* things means a great deal—that knowledge depends in great measure on passion and intensity.[1] How intensely do we know?

Do we, as a rule, grasp a tithe of the value of such men as Paul, Augustine, Luther, Knox and John Wesley—men, all of them, of academic habit and intellectual activity—all interested intensely in truth and in moral progress, and all brought to the position of understanding that they cannot help themselves? Each one of them is, in a sense, a man who has failed, who has made a great surrender; and each, as a result, has entered on a new life, the "given life" we might call it, of extraordinary power, while he is still growingly conscious of his own weakness. "If I perish," wrote Luther to Melanchthon,[2] "it will be no loss to the gospel,

[1] Compare the saying of Novalis: "Philosophiren ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren."
[2] 26th May, 1521.

for you far surpass me. . . . Do not be troubled in spirit; but sing the Lord's song in the night as we are commanded, and I shall join in. . . . The Lord, the universal Shepherd, still lives, who will not suffer even a bird to starve;" and he dates his letter "in the region of the birds who sing beautifully on the trees, praising God night and day with all their might." And again, in a memorable sentence: "*Nos nihil sumus; Christus solus est omnia.*"[1] John Knox again writes in 1553, "The pane of my heid and stomock trubillis me greitlie; daylie I find my brain decay, but the providence of God sall not be frustrat." Every one of these men, and they are far from being the only ones, would say that his life might be summed up in the word that came to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is perfected in weakness."[2] The whole story of Christian missions is the same—a long record of men and women on whom "necessity is laid;" they have been "brought" to believe, and they must spread the good news that has reached them from God in Christ—in weakness, it is true, but "out of weakness made strong."

The great Christian characters who make the Church are our inheritance—not as a museum

[1] "We are nothing; Christ alone is all."
[2] Cf. Augustine *Confessions* viii, 11, 27, *Quid in te stas et non stas? Proice te in eum; noli metuere:* etc.

of antiquities or curiosities might be a man's embarrassing heirloom,—but as an immense fund of spiritual capital. The experience of every one of them may be used to interpret our own, for in it what in our own is perplexing or immature may become intelligible—even Christ Himself sometimes only becomes intelligible to us in the lives of other men. This is one great feature of the Church—one that will secure that it at least will never be superseded, or transcended, so long as spiritual kinship is a reality in human life.

THE GREAT CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

The next aspect of our inheritance to be considered is the persistence of certain great fundamental conceptions. It must be owned at once that the central doctrines of the Church do not become plausible by being stated in words or written down on paper. The Church has realised this from the very beginning. "It is your philosophy, not your theology, which is such a torment to you," wrote Luther to Melanchthon [1]; and that has been the experience of the Church. So long as "the unexamined life is un-live-able for a human being" (in Plato's phrase), philosophy will be natural to man, and the Church is not exempt from it.

[1] 27th June, 1530.

But Christian thinkers have failed from time to time to distinguish between philosophy and the conclusions of philosophers—*dogmata,* as the ancients called them. Like most of us, they have always had a lurking suspicion that the philosophy of their own day was final, and they have endeavoured very often to square Christian doctrine with that. Strange results have followed—theories that cause us at least the utmost perplexity, to imagine how any sane person could have held them, Christian or non-Christian. But the Church, in the dogged way of those who go by instinct, has stoutly held by its own beliefs,—beliefs grounded on experience and so far verifiable,—whether they tallied or did not tally with current thought. That this has been so, is of value to us also; for we, like many before us, are "tormented by our philosophy," and it is something to realise that again and again the Church, if it had come to terms with the thought of a particular day, would have become obsolete in a century or two and ceased to be.[1]

Wherever the Church has wandered in thought or practice, certain central convictions stand out as fixed points. Where they have been abandoned, the Church has died away;

[1] For instance, in the case of the Arian controversy—in the opinion of historians not all ecclesiastical.

where they have been held, it has stood, and stood in power against all the forces that militate against it, in exact measure with the tenacity and faith with which it has held them. There has been constant and insistent pressure and criticism from without, and as constant an inclination from within to compromise. The test of an emotion, a faith or a truth is what it will survive; and the strength of the central convictions of the Church is measured by the forces of disruption and decline that they have resisted. Here again the experience of the Church is an incalculably valuable asset in the spiritual life. We are only too liable to-day to undervalue it; and yet anyone, who means to deal seriously with life, may well lay stress on such a mass of records of individuals peculiarly gifted with spiritual insight, and on the history of the Church as a community; for, like every other great community, it is in the long run more liable to prove right than any individual however gifted. Let us look at these central convictions.

Grace

First of all we may set the great doctrine of Grace—"the greatest of all the Catholic doctrines," Renan said. Many a man will have accepted it on the strength of his own spiritual

experience enlightened by that of others, before he is entirely sure of what else the Church has to say.

It has been said lately that men as a rule do not care much about the doctrine of grace until they reach the age of thirty. The remark would not of course be pressed; but there is this element of truth in it, that it is not till we begin to get a just measure of our own forces and deficiencies, that we care to ask for Divine aid.

> "When Duty whispers low, Thou must,
> The youth replies, I can."

The man in middle age is less ready with the answer. "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me?" is more apt to be his thought. Grace implies a surrender and a habit of acceptance, for which not everybody is ready at the same stage.

It begins with the sense of failure. "Christianity is the religion of all poor devils," the German Jew Börne said. Conscious of failure, conscious too that he can no longer wrestle against failure, the unhappy man begins to be willing to accept what is given him, whatever it be. He leaves off thinking of himself and of his sin, his temptations and his weakness, and puts himself, with all his failure and limita-

tions, into God's hands, to be dealt with as He will. Effort, endeavour, every rag of will and independence, it seems—the past and all its memories and the habits it has bred—the present and all its difficulties—the future too—all goes into the hands of God; and God undertakes all. A new joy and a new power come into life; and a fresh start is made; and then the old experience repeats itself. For, God having forgiven the past, the man starts anew, as before, and stumbles, again; he is trying to blend grace with the old life, and it is not to be done. Again he betakes himself to self-examination, and is dissatisfied with his progress—he feels he should have done better. Worry and disappointment follow, and more resolve; prayer becomes entreaty against sin, and the mind is saturated with a sense of its own weakness; life grows difficult and miserable under the thought of failure renewed, and failure heightened by ingratitude. Once more the old story—till at last it is realised that grace is not an affair of a moment in the Christian experience, but the whole of it. The debt of gratitude will not be paid except by being perpetually increased. Grace is to be the unceasing inflow of Divine love and power into the surrendered life, in such measure that, as Paul puts it, it abounds and more than abounds—overflows in-

creasingly—the saturation of the heart with the Divine love and the constant acceptance of the Divine will and the Divine power. *Da quod iubes et iube quod vis.*[1]

"Man so giveth place to God," says the writer of the *Theologia Germanica,* "that God Himself is there, and yet the man too, and this same unity worketh continually, and doeth and leaveth undone without any I, and Me, and Mine, and the like; behold there is Christ, and nowhere else."[2] "Nothing burneth in hell but self-will. Therefore it hath been said 'Put off thine own will, and there will be no hell.'"[3] "So long as there is any self-will, there will never be true love, true peace, true rest."[4] "It is God that worketh in you," wrote Paul, "both to will *and to do* of His good pleasure."

It all depends, the Church has seen, on whether we accept God's promises to forgive the past, to redeem the lost opportunity, to restore the lost faculties, and Himself to carry us through everything, on His own terms. Difficulty round about and within, a deepening consciousness of weakness and inadequacy, and the experience that, with a daily surrender to God's will and a daily acceptance of His power

[1] Augustine, *Confessions*, X., 29, 40. "Give what Thou dost bid, and bid what Thou wilt."
[2] Chapter xxiv.
[3] Chapter xxxiv.
[4] Chapter li.

flooding life with joy[1] and peace and helpfulness, all things become possible—these are the foundations on which the Church's doctrine of grace rests; and they have been well tested in the centuries.

The Incarnation

But, in all probability, we shall be told we are treating things in the wrong order. Even before the doctrine of Grace, there should come that of the Incarnation. However it be with the personal story of one man and another, the Church at least sets this first and history confirms it. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself"—the Pauline expression puts the doctrine in its simplest form. "We preach Christ crucified," he wrote, and he went on to explain that he knew men called it foolishness, and stumbled at it. Men have always stumbled at it, and always will, one supposes. On this doctrine of the Incarnation no compromise has been found possible by the Church. Men may reject it if they will—or if they can; they may re-interpret it, explain it, philosophise it, do what they will with it; but to the

[1] More might be made by Christian people of the value of joy as an index to truth. Cf. Wordsworth, (Tintern Abbey, 47):

"With an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things."

belief that the Good Shepherd sought the lost sheep and brought it back on His shoulder rejoicing—that He gave His own life for it,—the Church has always held. Incarnation and Redemption in the death of Christ—the two doctrines go together. God loved, God came, God suffered, God sought, God found—whom or what? And the answer of the Church and of each individual Christian has always been the same—"Me." "Who loved me and gave Himself for me," writes Paul of himself; and elsewhere he says: "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

Such a faith is never easy, nor are great beliefs ever easy. An easy faith could never have held the Church together. Long ago Tertullian pointed out that men did not generally care to die for the compromises made between the faith of the Church and the philosophies of the heathen world. There is even something ludicrous in the idea of a man dying for the crucified phantom of the Docetist; who could die for a Jesus who devised a conjuring trick in order

to avoid death Himself? It was not thinkable.

> There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon, and stars, brother, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?

So Jasper Petulengro asks Lavengro. So, too, the Church has asked itself over and over again, and with a consciousness of a new sweetness in life.

> Heaven above is softer blue,
> Earth around is sweeter green!
> Something lives in every hue
> Christless eyes have never seen:
> Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
> Flowers with deeper beauties shine,
> Since I know, as *now* I know
> I am His, and He is mine.

Christians, as an early apologist pointed out, are very like other people—the same words, the same dress, the same instincts. Whatever fanatics did in excitement, the quiet Christian people who made the Church have never sought martyrdom nor, very much, put themselves in the way of it; but they did not put themselves out of the way of it. And, when it came to the central convictions as to the Redeemer on the cross and all that was involved in His death, there was no compromise—life might be sweet, but it did not matter—nothing mattered, in

comparison. "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things," wrote Paul.

> Nature, in her false freedom, weeneth she hath forsaken all things, yet she will have none of the cross, and saith she hath had enough of it already and needeth it no longer, and thus she is deceived. For had she ever tasted the cross, she would never part with it again.

So wrote the author of the *Theologia Germanica.*[1]

Once more, to men who in every fibre of their thinking are individualists—as so many of us are apt to be—who will each start anew to think the world out, wavering and shifting as to truth and the criteria by which it may be judged —there is something awful, something wonderful, in the great spectacle of the Church in its solidarity standing one great witness to a faith, which the individual, with his short range, working on preconceptions imposed on him by his day, would pronounce impossible and incredible. It is something to realise that in every age men have found it impossible and incredible, and have committed themselves to a faith that went beyond their understanding and been justified.[2] We do not use to the full the experience of the Church here.

[1] Chapter li.

[2] In this connection it may be permitted to quote the famous and sometimes misunderstood epigram of Tertullian, *De carne Christi* 5: *Prorsus credibile est quia ineptum est . . . certum est quia impossibile.*

The Last Judgment

Lastly, for a moment, we may consider the great doctrine of Christ as Master and Christ as Judge. The modern reader may be moved indeed with the tremendous imagery of the Great White Throne and the last Judgment, as given in the Apocalypse and in the Hymn of Thomas of Celano. It is sublime—but does it represent fact? It might be argued that nothing is sublime that does not answer to deep conviction of elemental truth. But we may take another path of a less speculative character. Committing themselves to this doctrine of Christ the Master and Christ the Judge, the Christian communities have set before themselves unapproachable standards and inaccessible ideals. The reach exceeds the grasp, in Browning's phrase; and it has historically been justified. The progress of human morality may be popularly explained by evolution; but this is to play with phrases. Most of us do not know what we mean by evolution. Historically, nothing has helped mankind forward so uniformly and so steadily as this concentration of the Church's thought on its Master and its Judge. Here was motive, here was passion. The spectacle of Him who died for the slave as much as for the free man, for barbarian

as well as for Greek, for woman no less than for man, has been a safeguard of the weak, the value of which it is hard to calculate. The constant endeavour in age after age to re-embody the character of Christ—an endeavour not of individuals but of myriads, ever inspired and quickened by the Church's teaching of Christ—has been a gain to mankind beyond our words. If all the Church taught on this was error, it was to the good of mankind; but error has not such a harvest. Rather, whatever the errors in the Church's presentment of her faith, somewhere in it must be truth, if truth can be found at all.

From the very beginning and ever onwards right in the centre of all their thoughts, the Christian communities have had Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in whom God was, reconciling the world unto Himself. He has been the leaven within the Church, disruptive, propulsive, re-creating and stirring, the permanent life, the guarantee and promise of a future that shall progressively transcend the past—

> No dead fact stranded on the shore
> Of the oblivious years,

but the living Christ, always recognised, and owned and loved by the Church. The great function of the Church has been to witness to

Him, and to bring the world face to face with Him. Whenever we think of a Christian Society, we are driven into the consideration of the origin of the Church and of its work. The Church came into being through the instinct that held together, and bound more and more closely together, those men and women for whom Christ had meant new life, for whom "to live was Christ," and who realised that their work in the world could only be done by their association with one another in Christ. There is no such motive for union as the love of Jesus.

If we are to make anything at all of the nature and purpose of a Christian Society, two things have to be studied—the individual Christian and the common life of the community. A community primarily consists of individuals, and they come first in the claim for attention, though it is also the case that association makes certain changes in the individual, which are not always to be predicted nor always very easy to understand. We may best begin with the individual.

II

THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

We do not, as a rule, realise with enough clearness how the Church actually began. Yet in the Gospels it is stated simply enough. The history of the Church, like the history of the religious life of every one of us, began with a call and a command.

> Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishers. He saith unto them, "Follow Me."

Over and over again in the Gospels the story of a new life begins in this way—or the story of a life is ended for every effective purpose. There is the man who replies to the call that he must "bury his father," to whom the command of Jesus comes with a strangely sharp and imperative note: "Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God." Or again, Jesus sees Levi in his customhouse

and calls him—"Follow Me," and the man follows Him. Whether early tradition or modern criticism is nearer the fact as to the origin of the First Gospel, it is significant that the early Church picked a man of such antecedents as a likely person to have given a true story of Jesus Christ. The instinct was sound; it is only such a man or woman—one who will rise up and leave all to follow Jesus Christ—who will ever give a full and true account of Him. On the other hand, there is the rich young ruler, of whom we read that Jesus looked on him and loved him, and of whom none the less the last we see is his back turned on Jesus Christ. He may have lived to grow old and respected, full of the conventional decencies and dignities of old age, satisfied too that he had that day done the right thing—but one feels it was the end of the man. When we reach the calling of the chosen band, the evangelist uses a very suggestive phrase. "He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would; and they came unto Him. And He ordained twelve that they should be with Him."

"That they should be with Him"—here lies the first definition of the Christian Church. In epitome it is the history of Christianity. These men were "with Him"—they slipped, some of

them perhaps rather reluctantly, into a great intimacy. They consorted with Jesus in a life of wandering and often of weariness. Such stories as that of the Samaritan village give a glimpse of what it must have been—a day's travel, and this time it was travel in great tension of spirit, for His face was "set" for Jerusalem—hospitality refused—a blaze of anger and a fierce wish on the part of the disciples, —and then the Master's quiet word: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." The evangelist adds simply: "And they went to another village"—an ending stripped of every heroic touch, and yet wonderfully suggestive to any one who will follow them in imagination till he grasps all. It is such a life, stripped of all padding, that shows the real man.

They share His life—its triumphs and popularities, its prospects and hopes, its failures and disappointments, the rough and the smooth, as life came to Him. They saw Him in every sort of situation, at every sort of disadvantage, and they came to know Him, they would have said, through and through—though afterwards they might not have been so sure. They talked with Him, one supposes, about every conceivable topic, in which men could be interested—

Herods and Roman Governors,—zealot tales told by Simon, custom house memories of Levi, fisher talk of Peter and James and John, neighbour-talk of home and men and their sons—even gossip of Galilean tragedies in Jerusalem and accidents of falling towers. What failed to interest Him? When one looks at the structure of the Gospels, one finds how much they rest on odd snatches of these many talks and conversations—a word or two of introduction to give you the episode or incident—just enough to bring out the peculiar relevance of the word —and then: "And He said unto them." Incident after incident takes us into their relations with one another. Even the words He uses for His friends—τέκια and παιδία—are suggestive. How apt He is to use the diminutive in speaking of people and things He loves, or in speaking to them! The "little flock"—and as if ποιμνίον were not enough, Luke adds the adjective to make it clear—Jairus' "little girl" —even the sparrows are represented in Greek by a diminutive. It is something to be able through His diminutives to steal into the mind of Christ.

For the point which I wish to make is that these men not only follow Jesus in His travels up hill and down dale, but they follow Him in the fluxes and refluxes of His thought, in all

His experience, sometimes afar off and sometimes very near Him. "Ye are they," He says, "which have continued with me in my temptations"—one of the most striking expressions of the New Testament. He has His temptations, and somehow or other these men contribute to Him—perhaps simply by being with Him. For it is clear from Mark's record that He was often unintelligible to them, and was surprised to find that He was so. Yet they watch Him in every mind and mood; and wonder, Plato said, is the mother of philosophy. They study Him the closer, and come gradually nearer to realising the way in which He sees and feels.

They see Him watching Nature, and His words impress them, implant themselves in their minds and linger—words about flowers, and little birds falling out of nests, sheep lost or worried, hens and chickens, ploughing, cattle, and even dogs—"little dogs," the Gospel has it. They catch something of His thought here. But it is of course the human situations that most occupy them—the amazing interest Jesus feels in men and women, and in children. When the children are brought to Jesus and are turned away by the disciples, we do not always notice that, though the familiar hymn speaks of "the stern disciples," the Gos-

pel shows that it was Jesus Himself who was stern. He was vexed (ἠγανάκτησεν). It is not that He graciously made space and time for the mothers and their children; He was annoyed with the disciples; and we are left for all time with the matter put straight, and Jesus sitting with the children on His lap in the crook of His arm (ἐναγκαλισάμενος). It is worth while to remember that this story must come from the disciples who had the scolding; they loyally accepted it and came deeper into His mind.

They watch Him in the great questions of right and wrong—how careless He seems of the Sabbath, how "angry" with those who are shocked at a man being healed on that day; how tolerantly He seems to treat what they count the grave sins, and how the sins, that are so natural as to be virtually right, set Him on fire! What does His tolerance for the vulgar sins that bring men to gaols and hospitals mean —His tenderness for gross sinners—His impatience with the hardness of respectable people? They are thrown out of their reckoning, and they have to re-think their standards. They are following Him in earnest now—through His words and thoughts and feelings. From His outlook on suffering, from His own share in it, they begin to learn a deeper view of it; though even so the Cross is an intense shock to them.

Yet here again, in a way, they follow Him, and learn of Him, and gain a new outlook into God's ways and methods. And they learn, without thinking of it, a new feeling for those who suffer.

Above all, slowly picking their way after His footprints, they come to His view of God—perplexed and startled again and again by His new instinct for God, His new intelligence of God. Everybody of course around them believed in some way or other in God; but here was one for whom God was indeed. In the last resort men think of God—the last factor in a situation; for Jesus God is the first factor—a splendid element of joy and happiness, the present guarantee of right here and now, the large-natured Father. Whenever Jesus speaks of God, they seem to see God. Parable after parable, conceived in an incredible spirit of largeness and tenderness and charm, brings home God—God who gives and forgives in a great way and wins love by it, like the creditor in the story, or the prodigal's father, or the good Samaritan. And they in turn find their way, prompted by the repeated wonder of the thoughts of Jesus, to this central realisation of God. What must it have been to hear Him say "Have faith in God," and to watch His face as He said it!

They divine more or less what this intimacy

with God means for Jesus, and form new ideas of what prayer may be from what they see it is for Him. Their own familiar ways in prayer grow old; intercourse with Him leads to the consciousness that they need to be taught anew to pray. We may say that, in a sense, they overhear Him in prayer, and learn His methods—the early rising for prayer in the quiet place—the ease of His approach—His sense of God's readiness to listen. If He taught them to pray, it was by example—unconsciously—as much as by word.

Step by step they follow; and then on a day that could not be forgotten, they watched Him gaze upon the crowds, scattered like shepherdless sheep worried by dogs. And then, stirred in a memorable way, He turned and said with feeling: "The harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few;" and He asked something of them: "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth labourers into His harvest," as if He felt that their prayers would help things forward. It was thus He taught to pray. It was here too, perhaps, that they began to see the meaning and purpose of the Cross in a love for man, which they had not guessed, and which, as they slowly realised, could find no other expression.

A span of a few years, or of a few weeks,

and you find a different body of men, not broken men, nor disappointed men, but men who have followed their Master in thought and feeling to the very Cross and beyond, and are now transformed and inspired with a new love for a victorious Lord and Saviour, and for His thoughts and His methods. They have a sense of being His servants and His friends, that carries them far.

All this is ancient history, but it is history that repeats itself. Much of the present-day hesitation and perplexity as to the Christian religion is due to the fact that the old order of things is set upside down; that instead of our following Jesus Christ through the movements of His mind, through His experiences, His impulses, all His insight and all His feeling—we, if it may be put so, require Him to follow us along the line of our preconceptions. But neither new learning nor new discovery ever comes so, but by a more humble attitude to fact. The preconceptions of most of us are not very original; they are mostly derived from common talk and magazines, and progress is only possible when we cease to be limited by them.

In any case, for the matter now in hand, we have to realise that for a Christian society the following of Jesus Christ by each individual

is vital. Whatever we make in a speculative way of "re-birth," as a rule it will come after rather than before some measure of following Christ. To understand the great Christian Church, of which every Christian society is at once a party and a copy, we have to realise Jesus Christ by following Him, in three aspects at least—Jesus as Teacher; Jesus as Master; Jesus as Friend and Saviour.

JESUS AS TEACHER

First of all, we need clearer ideas of Jesus as necessarily our Teacher. "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," He says; and He adds: "Learn of Me." It is the last thing that many of us have thought of doing. Yet before we are in a position to express opinions about Him which can be of the slightest value, we have, like the first disciples, to follow Him a great deal more closely than we do. It is a commonplace in art and literature and music that great masters and their masterpieces impose a discipline upon the critic; he must begin by learning from them in frank humility, till he can understand them from within. If Schlegel is to criticise Euripides, Goethe said, it should be "upon his knees." St. Paul here gives us a picture of the true method for the disciple—identification with the Mas-

ter. Twice over St. Paul speaks of men being shaped into the likeness of God's Son. In *Romans* viii. 29, he says that some are predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son (*συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνος*), and in *Philippians* iii. 10 he speaks of the possibility of himself "being made conformable unto His death" (*συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ*) and knowing "the fellowship of His sufferings." Elsewhere (*Gal.* ii. 20) He describes himself as "crucified with Christ," and his friends at Colossæ (*Col.* ii. 12) as "buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him."

St. Paul sets the standard high, but he has forecast the story of the Christian Church, for the Christian life is the entering, with growing passion and intensity, into the experience of Jesus Christ, till it is known not by report from external sources, but by identification. How near has the Church come, or does it come —or the special Society of which we may think —to the Cross? How deep has it drunk of the cup from which He drank? These might be the questions of St. Paul, if he discussed our own Christian community with us; or, he might be more direct, and ask us these questions as individuals: What do *we* know about it?

What *do* we know of it all? "Dead with Christ"—"living in Christ"—"Christ liveth

in me''—which of us would feel easy in using Paul's language? Yet this is the learning of Christ that has to be achieved by each Christian, if the Society is to be effective in Christ's sense. It is living ''with Him,'' till we have entered into the Passion and come through it into the ''newness of life,'' of which Paul speaks, and with a face, which, like that of Moses in the old story, comes from the great initiation shining with a new light. Nor does Paul suggest that all is yet done; there is ''the mind that was in Christ Jesus'' to be known more and more intensely—''bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'' This is St. Paul's conception of our work with Jesus Christ as our Teacher.

All this may seem to lean to the mystical, but it has to be supplemented in two ways. We have to go to the Gospels and read them more intensely and closely than we are used to do. We have to know and to watch and to grow into intimacy, by following along the historical path. But there are those, we are told, for whom this implies a measure of the historical imagination of which they are incapable. The criticism is not very important, for it is surprising how much is realised even by illiterate or half-educated readers of the Gospel

story. Jesus has always been intelligible to simple people. Something too may be expected of members of a Christian community in the way of intellectual discipline, where the end is a deeper realisation of our Master. But there is also the school of daily life, where, to any one who is even beginning to develop the mind that was in Christ, the common occurrences and the ordinary people will present themselves in a new way, if he is careful, until quite unconsciously he comes to think much as his Master would. Finally, in prayer, we have to go with our Teacher, as the early disciples did, and learn of Him and listen to Him, till our prayer becomes a thing of more depth and sympathy, of more insight and more faith. Prayer is not easy—less easy as one realises how much even the slightest prayer implies. But, when we study in the school of Jesus Christ, we cease to think about impossibilities, and do as He did, instinctively; we learn to pray somehow; and (here is the experience of the Church) God does the rest.

Again and again it comes with a shock to us —how little we know Christ; and yet when we think what He has been to those who have taken Him seriously and followed Him in earnest and known His mind—even when we

look back on our own experience and see what we ourselves have learnt and unlearnt,—we begin to divine what He may be, as we grow more willing to obey the call, "Follow Me."

JESUS AS MASTER

For, after all, obedience is the gist of the matter. Jesus Christ is our Master and claims our obedience; at any rate the obedience of men and women who are members of a Christian Society. It is a great deal easier to turn the historical imagination on to the Gospel records, to study the origins and growth of the Gospel story, and all that scholarship has to offer us—a fascinating task, and vastly easier than obedience. But in the Gospel story it is clearly indicated how Jesus spoke of Master and servant. "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord." We may find ourselves, He suggests, unprofitable servants at best. After the ploughing is done, there is still the table to lay and the meal to get—still service, still obedience. And more than this, there is the great sentence in St. John: "As Thou hast sent me into the world, I have sent them." The Christian community is under the law to Christ; it avowedly and deliberately owes Him obedience, and is

charged with His errands. Apostleship is added service, and it is hard to see how Christians can be supposed to be exempt from it—as if lower standards of love were asked of us than the Master looked for. Nor, after all, is it easy to see why a Christian, in any full sense of the term, would wish to be exempted, when he realises the love of God in Christ. If we take the Good Shepherd as the great type of Christ, if we remember that we also are among those whom He has sought and found; we may find ourselves committed to a more thoroughgoing search for the lost sheep than at first we like. But this has to be faced, for it is implied in Jesus Christ's idea of our relation to Himself that our mission to those who need Him "in all the world" is not an occasional duty but of the essence of the whole matter.

In the next place we have to realise how learning of Jesus and following Jesus act and re-act on each other. "If any man will do his will, he shall know," says the Gospel. "The best things I know," said Saint Theresa, "came to me not by revelation but by obedience." We shall not get much by revelation without obedience. That is St. Paul's experience: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." And it was followed by many more. But we must

never forget the cost: "I bear branded in my body the *stigmata* of the Lord Jesus."[1]

We are charged with work for Christ. It may be in the daily round and common task, it may be outside these—far outside them. For if Jesus Christ is to be taken seriously, the salvation of the heathen is the concern of every group in the Church; and if it is the affair of the society, the members are not exempt from the responsibility. Historically, the call has as often reached the Church through the individual as the individual through the Church. It is disquieting to realise how serious this responsibility is and how lightly it is taken.

JESUS AS FRIEND

If we speak of Jesus as Teacher and Master, the whole testimony of the Church in every age of its life must be added, to the reality of Jesus as Friend and Saviour. "I have not called you servants; I have called you friends"—friends of Jesus Christ, with the promise of infinite help and friendship. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden" were not the casual words of a stranger. The men who heard them knew the speaker; and that

[1] St. Paul's reference is to the practice of branding slaves, which in the later and less military days of the Roman Empire, had to be extended to conscripts—in each case lest they should run away.

knowledge gave the words the meaning they have always had for Christian people. "All men forsook me," wrote Paul, "but the Lord stood at my side and put strength into me;" and he adds: "and the Lord will deliver me." Or look at some of the great doxologies of the New Testament, for in men's doxologies we often get nearer fact than in their dogma; they are simpler and come more spontaneously from the situation: "To Him who is able to keep *you* from falling—": "To Him who is able to establish *you*:"—"To Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

The more we study the records of Christian experience, particularly the records of those who are most deeply engaged in difficult and dangerous work for the diffusion of the Gospel and the reclamation of the lost—the more it comes home to us how little we believe in Jesus Christ. Here are men and women who have ventured all upon the incredible promises of help and power and new life—and what they have made of life astounds us. On the terms which our Lord laid down so clearly of learning and obeying, what experience they have had of how He keeps, how He uses, how He gives a man or a woman the power to heal broken lives around them, or, better still, how

through them He does it Himself, communicating Himself and all He brings through them in a way that surprises them! What has He been to them in every hour of need! "He is our peace."

Jesu, dulcis memoria,
Dans vera cordis gaudia,
Sed super mel et omnia
Ejus dulcis praesentia.

Jesu, spes poenitentibus,
Quam pius es petentibus!
Quam bonus te quaerentibus!
Sed quid invenientibus?[1]

[1] Readers who prefer Caswall's rendering, "Jesus, the very thought of Thee," will forgive the presence of two stanzas of the original Latin of St. Bernard.

III

THE PLACE AND WORK OF THE CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

The Christian Society consists, as we have seen, of men and women living the new life—people born again, in whom Christ is formed, as St. Paul puts it. Each has had his or her own experience, has made, in gladness or with shame, the great surrender and entered upon the great obedience and the great intimacy. It is an association of those for whom much has been done—who draw together in the sheer joy that comes from sharing such a Friend. On them is laid individually and corporately the responsibility for their Saviour's message to the present and the future. There is an incalculable element in every form of association—the group is a different thing from the sum of its constituents, whether lower or higher. Here (it has been the belief of every Church in every age) the spirit of the whole is given as the life is given, and very beautiful have been the names given to it—the Earnest, and

the Seal, and the Spirit of Jesus. Only, so every generation of Christians has believed, in this association of those who are redeemed by Christ and have made their surrender and acceptance, can the full benefit be received, or the full effect be given to the inevitable testimony. The seed will grow wherever there is soil, but the wheat has a better chance of reaching maturity in the field. Atmosphere makes many things possible that seem impossible. The solidarity of the Christian Church throughout the ages, and the unity of its experience, in spite of the want of unity in its opinions and organisations, tell immensely in the experience of the individual Christian. If that testimony is to be maintained, if the world is to have an effective chance of being brought to Christ, the Christian society is essential.

In the early Celtic Church, we are told, Saintship became hereditary; and that Church gave place to another of sterner ideals and a richer realisation of the Grace of God. And in turn, one Church after another yields to the new society with a fresh and fuller inspiration and a closer touch of Jesus Christ. What else is the origin of the Society of Friends? "Then, O! then," writes George Fox, "I heard a Voice, which said, *'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy Condition':* And when I

heard it, my Heart did leap for Joy." And again: "I saw the great *Love* of *God;* and I was filled with admiration at the *Infiniteness* of it. And then I saw . . . how by *Jesus,* the *Opener* of the Door by his Heavenly *Key,* the Entrance was given." When the older group does not actually disappear, it too is apt to be driven back upon its origins, and to realise anew the glory for which it stands. Is it desirable that a Church or a Christian society should continue except to minister to men the glad news of God—of incarnation and redemption and grace abounding? A Church with such a message the world needs, and for such a body men will give their lives. But if it offer faint ideals, or in a hesitating voice plead for mere possibilities of higher life; if in short it has no more to say than the copy books tell us —then there is no place for it in an active world. It may moulder in a corner aside, or wait for fresh revelation—but revelation hardly comes that way. It is not to be lightly decided that a Church or a man cannot recover the first love for Jesus Christ; and it is always possible, with religious societies as with individuals, that, in a new surrender to God's facts and God's will, a new vision will come, and a new knowledge of Him who loved the Church and gave Himself for it. Men may lose heart

and lose faith, and wait (not improperly) in their Churches; but to begin the Church life, to start their membership of the Church, with a great essential doubt at the heart of things, is hardly the right way. The Christian society is for those who have heard the call of Jesus Christ, "Follow Me," and who, in spite of doubts and uncertainties, have the central thing clear—that, whether possible or impossible, they must obey that call, in the faith, explicitly realised or unconsciously held, that somehow, where such a call is made, it will not be found impossible to follow such a Leader.

WORSHIP

One of the first purposes for which a Christian society exists is Worship. In the New Testament, and in books more or less contemporary with it, we have pictures of early Christian worship lightly sketched by friendly or critical hands. The meetings are diversified with sacrament and hymn, preaching and prophesying, doxology and prayer. Two or three theories of common worship are current —that it is essentially ascription of praise and thanksgiving to God—that it is communion with God whether by means of consecrated elements or in silence, mystical or intellectual—that in

both of these a vital part is the re-assertion of the great faith of the Church, whether in set creed or in preaching. The end is edification—to use the familiar term of the Authorised Version. Stress will be laid by different thinkers in different directions, and each will find his warrant in the practice of the Church from the beginning, and perhaps in his own abstract theories as to what the Church's worship ought to be.

One or two things stand out. When it is real worship, common worship may take the individual soul a good deal further than it may go alone. We make the atmosphere for one another—courage, depression, hope, study, reflection, or whatever it may be; and faith is, as a matter of fact, as liable to be helped or hindered by environment. Prayer, when it is reality, and when it is the common activity in one place at one time of a community of like experience, may reach a higher plane than we have known before, not as a matter of mere emotion, but with results that do not pass away. Friendship and love are forces that have deep spiritual effects that endure; and where they come into play in a Christian society, in a common experience of Christ and His saving power, in a common access to Him, it should not be surprising that the life of such a com-

munity may deeply affect the life of the individual and lift it upward into real doxology—that Emmaus, as it has been put, may become Emmanuel.

> It is our life at Thy feet we throw
> To step with into light and joy;
> Not a power of life but we employ . . .
> Canst thou help us, must we help thee?
> If any two creatures grew into one
> They would do more than the world has done;
> Though each apart were never so weak,
> Ye vainly through the world should seek
> For the knowledge and the might
> Which in such union grew their right.[1]

Life is re-inforced by this solidarity of the Christian communion, for in it Christ becomes more real, and things are apt to be seen here *sub specie aeternitatis* in their true proportions. Such vision of reality will, over and over again, be translated into action and consecration. The common worship, if it is the act of all and done in deep seriousness, passes out of the formal into the effective; with or without mystical rite or element, it becomes communion, and we understand in a new and quieter way what the early Church meant by its doctrine of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit is not bound by our choosing, but it is possible for us to become more receptive. It is easy to see how men have come

[1] Browning, "Flight of the Duchess."

to the view that through the Church the gift of the Spirit is mediated.[1]

WITNESS

This, then, is our first point. Worship is one of the great ends of a Christian Society, and, when we conceive it so, the transition to the next is easy. For, if the Society exists for the development of those within it, the development of those outside is not really another thing—especially when these may really be standing very near.

Nearest of all, surely, to the members of a Christian Society must stand their own children and the children of their fellow-believers. The first disciples loyally told the story of the scolding they had in the matter of the little children; and, from the very earliest Christian times, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" has been the experience of all Christian communities. To-day, perhaps, there is a relaxation in the sense that it is a Christian duty and a joy to teach the young the great cardinal principles of the faith. They are left to grow up naturally—unguided here, while in every other region of life it is realised how much the mind needs to be trained.

[1] It is, I think, right to say here that these paragraphs are an epitome of my observation and experience of the Student Christian Movement.

In what art, in what branch of learning, in what trade, can the child be trusted to train itself? How can we expect the growing child,

Moving about in worlds not realized,

to know where best to look for the truth on which life depends? The letters of Mr. Gladstone on religious subjects to his children are a rebuke to us. He was interested in his children developing the sense for God, and he took pains to guide them.

Mr. Gladstone inculcated on his eldest boy the duty of regularity in morning and evening prayer and in daily reading of the Bible.—

"It is good," he writes, "to acquire a habit of reading the New Testament for devotion in the Greek when you can do it with ease." "Bear about with you upon the eye of your mind the image of Christ in whom we live; especially of Christ crucified." "Place habit, then, on the side of religion. You cannot depend upon your tastes and feelings towards Divine things to be uniform: lay hold upon an instrument which will carry you over their inequalities, and keep you in the honest practice of your spiritual exercises, when but for this they would have been intermitted." [1]

Part of a Christian man's duty—and part of a community's—is the guidance of the perplexed. We live in a time when, with every kind of emphasis, views, half-views and no-views are pressed upon men and women by

[1] D. C. Lathbury, *Letters on Church and Religion of W. E. Gladstone*, vol. II., pp. 413, 414, 419.

earnest propagandists; from the hardest and crudest rationalism of the blatant "common-sense" order up to faiths and philosophies, in closer touch with the biology and psychology of scientific researchers. In the most surprising places one comes on people who have been laid hold of by splendid half-views, who hail them as new revelations, the consummation of Christian thinking. Journalism touches everything to-day, and there is a chaos of thinking not unlike that of the early Roman Empire into which Jesus sent the men who had learnt of Him and followed Him—not, assuredly, to hold their tongues and by communion with Him and fellowship with one another to develop their own souls. "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!" said St. Paul. We have to realise that, if ever the special conditions of an age called for clear, thoughtful and brave preaching of the Person of Christ, and for the kind and wise guidance of the young to the centre of things, it is our own day.

We may persuade ourselves that Christian character speaks for itself—it does speak; but a Christian character that is inarticulate will not speak very clearly. Besides, when all is said and done, we are apt to give the epithet Christian to much that is merely human and natural to man. Christian it is, because Christ

absorbs it and gives it a new value and a new significance, when the door is opened to Him. Sometimes there is even an element of indolence in our conception of beautiful character. But we have to realise that passivity, however charming, is not Christian; and that, if it speaks, its message will not be the full and complete Christ, but a partial Christ at best. "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The instinct of the early Church went to the parable of the Shepherd with the lost sheep upon his shoulders for its type of Christ. They were right. A character or a Church which lacks the impulse to seek and to save the lost may have its beauties of old tradition, or even such holiness as is associated with quietism, but—"if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."

The Church has a message and a mission, and the world knows it. The world will not listen just yet—it is in too great a hurry—but it knows very well where to go when it realises that the time has come. Men and women, too, on whom the currents of modern thought are playing, who are not very obviously "the lost," look to the Church for guidance. Sometimes the Christian Societies will not listen to their perplexities, so idle and fantastic do they seem;

but they are real enough to those whom they trouble. Not unnaturally much Christian preaching has little meaning for people under such circumstances; the preachers are too like medical men prescribing for diseases they have not diagnosed. Without metaphor, there is a danger in speaking to people whose language and whose thoughts we neither share nor understand; for they at least have the sense that our vocabularies differ, and they will cease to listen very quickly. How much identification did our Lord Himself need with human shame and sorrow, before He became intelligible to man? If the Church or the Christian Society is to speak to any purpose it must be on the terms of "being baptised with all experiences;" and then men and women will listen to us—they may not accept what we urge upon them, but they will at any rate move forward to the view that the Christian position is one tenable with a real experience and knowledge of the intellectual life and its difficulties.

One of the most famous passages in George Fox's *Journal* turns on this very point. "The Lord answered, *That it was needful, I should have a sense of all Conditions; how else should I speak to all Conditions?* And in this I saw the infinite *Love* of *God.*" Some three pages later, in the first folio edition, comes the epi-

sode when "the *Elements* and *Stars* came over me; so that I was in a manner quite *clouded* with it. . . . And as I sate still under it, and let it alone, a living Hope arose in me, and a true Voice arose in me, which said: *There is a living God, who made all things.* . . . And after some time I met with some People, that had such a Notion, *That there was no God, but that all things come by Nature.* And I had great Dispute with them, and overturned them; and made some of them Confess, that there was a *Living God:* Then I saw, that it was good, that I had gone through that Exercise."

There are many to-day wrestling with the same problem in various forms. In particular for some people the whole question of religion is taking on a new complexion from the psychological studies of our day. Let me quote a few lines from a very significant book lately published:—

"Psychology," says Professor Lake,[1] "explains the immediate cause of the phenomena, [*i.e.*, trance, vision, and speaking with tongues, in the early churches of Corinth and other places in the first century]; but what is the ultimate cause? That is to say what is religion? To discuss this question would be outside the limits of the present book, which have perhaps been already passed, but I cannot refrain from saying that if I do not mistake the signs of the times the really serious controversy of the future will be concerned with this point, even among those who are

[1] *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 251.

agreed in assigning the highest value to religion, and that the opposing propositions will be: (1) that religion is the communion of man, in the sphere of the subliminal consciousness, with some other being higher than himself; (2) that it is communion of man with his own subliminal consciousness, which he does not recognise as his own, but hypostasizes as some one exterior to himself. Those who wish to prepare for this controversy will do well to study on the one hand the facts of religion[1]—not of theology—and on the other the principles of psychology."

Nor is this the only trouble with which those around us have to contend. St. Augustine wrestled long with intellectual difficulties, and then found that his main problem was a moral one, the victory over animalism.

Now, we, who believe in Jesus Christ, not because we deliberately chose to believe, but because it became impossible to do anything else, believe also that He has sent us, in His own words, "as the Father sent Him"—to seek and to save men and women, upright, straight and honest, from the perplexities and temptations that undo the spiritual life. The Church has no choice here, unless it resolve to renounce its Master and Saviour. The Christian community is charged with speech—with speaking to all conditions, and with speaking to them intelligibly. It implies preparation and consecration, the dedicated spirit, sensitive to the va-

[1] I think "the facts of religion" will include that constant reproduction of high Christian character to which I have referred; and this at least is not subjective.

rieties of personality and situation. How far have we identified ourselves with people who (in the vulgar phrase) are going to the devil? Can we speak to them in a way that will help them—waking in them the sense that Christ's people are their friends indeed in a world where their experience finds friends grow fewer and friendship colder? How far, again, is the Church or the Christian Society a sympathetic atmosphere for people whose difficulties are spiritual or intellectual—a place where they are braced for forward movement?

The spoken word is needed; people come to us supposing that we have something that would help them if they could understand it. Can we explain ourselves? Can we make experience of Jesus Christ intelligible to people to-day? When the Holy Spirit really touches a man, he becomes sympathetic and intelligible. If we do not bring prepared addresses to our meetings, at least we ought to bring prepared men, ready for the work of God and knowing what it is. We are often astray in our ideas of what the Spirit does. Celsus in the second century wrote a sarcastic passage about the Christian gospel—picturing the Christian God as suddenly waking up, rubbing his eyes, and sending somebody off with a message. The call is not necessarily sudden: to Jeremiah it was

said that he was chosen before his birth, and the same was said to St. Paul. Ought we to wait to be called up as it were by telephone, when there is this awful volume of need around us? We may, again, wait so long for the right way of doing things, and the right moment, that they are never done at all. If we were more charged with the Spirit of Jesus, our call would be less fitful and occasional; if we were more loyal, we should realise how constant a need our Master has of His Church and its members, and that He can use them to some purpose; and we should be more available for such use, not now and then, but always.

What makes a great ministry is that a man or woman is charged with that sense of the responsibility of speaking for God to the needs of man, which comes from the love of Jesus; for identification with Him is the surest road to identification with the sin and sorrow of men. The condition of an effective message is that it is given under pressure. It may be the pressure of sin without and within; or it may be the pressure of joy in those who inwardly know what it is to "feel like singing all the time." It will best be the pressure of Jesus Christ. How far is He real to us? What does He mean to us in example and in force? What do we know of Paul's experience of bearing like

slaves, branded on our shoulders, the initials of Jesus Christ our Owner? Have we heard Him say to us also: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest"; and have we prayed the prayer for which He asks in the spirit in which He asked for it?

We are told, however, that in some quarters men and women "resent preaching." It is quite intelligible, for it is sorry work. "I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom." So wrote St. Paul, who knew quite well "the foolishness of preaching"—knew quite well, too, how his words struck Greek and Jew—and was sensitive to their contempt—and had to preach all the same. Once a man is charged with speaking in earnest, he can forgive people who have not a high opinion of his preaching; he will think less and less of it himself. He will recognise the sheer impotence of the best that he can give; and yet the task cannot be shirked. More and more he will realise the necessity for Another to speak through him. The humiliating sense, that we are not the right men for God to use, may mean after all that the channel is clear at last down which the living water can flow.

The only resource is prayer; and when that prayer comes with the cumulative force of a group of people, sympathetic with the great mission and knowing by experience in the past where prayer and faith can take them, then the task becomes more possible. Here is one of the great purposes of the Christian society—its intercession for each and all of its members actually committed to the task of speaking for God. And it is not a forlorn hope. Our children write us letters—clumsy, awkward efforts to convey their hopes as to our being quite well, to communicate their small affairs and their quaint requests—the characters straggle, the lines are uneven, the spellings are precarious, and at the end comes the real gist of the thing, the postscript of a row of little crosses, the signification of which fathers and mothers do not need to be told. Our speech, our preaching, done for Christ's sake to further His great quest of redemption, seem much like these letters—shaky and uncertain and empty; but Jesus Christ has His own postscripts, and they are added. And if we say that they are made in the same shape and have the same meaning, some people will recognise both shape and meaning. We are not left alone in the delivery of our message; but if it is given with faithfulness to Him Who gave it, and in a spirit

of identification with those to whom it is sent, even our efforts may prove, to our own amazement, to have been "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."[1]

THE NEED OF THE WORLD

But, apart from the perplexed and the disordered who stand round about us, and who can be reached by individuals, there is the need of the world. In every so-called Christian country we still have the spectacle of society without Christ; and in all the rest of the world, in addition to that, there is religion without Christ.

"Sad to look upon:" wrote Carlyle,[2] "in the highest stage of civilisation, nine tenths of mankind have to struggle in the lowest battle of savage or even animal man, the battle against Famine. Countries are rich, prosperous in all manner of increase, beyond example: but the Men of those countries are poor, needier than ever of all sustenance outward and inward; of Belief, of Knowledge, of Money, of Food."

After eighty years it is still the same story. We have indeed our records, honourable enough to those who did the work, of social progress; but it has been a slow business. The redemption of London and Birmingham is as hard a task as our Lord found that of Capernaum and

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 4.
[2] "Characteristics," *Edinburgh Review*, No. 108, 1831.

Jerusalem. Yet here is one of the purposes of the Christian Church, which He loved and for which He gave Himself. The burden goes beyond the strength of any single follower of Christ; it means the Christian society, shouldering it in its corporate capacity. The Shepherd with the sheep upon his shoulders may give us another suggestion; it is our Lord's conception of the attitude of the Church to lost humanity. Brave words! easy to speak and write! Yet what else is there?

Nam præfixa Cruci spes hominum viget.[1]

The world reacts on the Church, chilling faith, challenging ideals, dis-spiriting love and mocking hope—still more it reacts on the individual Christian. There is nothing for it but the only way of prayer and humility, and the power of God. The Church has faced problems before; and the problems of destitution will be solved. And the problems of sin, too; for here, as in the case of Augustine's intellectual difficulties, Christians must feel that social difficulties will be nearer their end, when once it is realised how large a part of them is due to moral and spiritual disorder somewhere in society, and that, perhaps, not solely in those

[1] Prudentius, *Cathemerinon*, v., 95. "For set upon the Cross, the hope of men doth flourish."

quarters where the bulk of the physical suffering lies.

This brings us to the yet larger question of the pagan world—of the vast masses of men and women and children, "for whom Christ died," for whom His Church does—nothing. If anything that has been said in the course of this lecture means anything at all, if there is any truth in Jesus Christ or any meaning in the story of the Church and its witness, if Christ belongs to humanity, to the whole of mankind of every race, surely the need of the world, lying in darkness, must press upon every Christian society. If Christ is anything to us, what of the regions beyond? Is not this the one thing which He asked His disciples to pray about? Is it tolerable to think of "Him who loved me and gave Himself for me," who also loved negro and Chinaman and gave Himself for them, and to realise how little we do to help Him to find those He seeks? Think of the need of the human heart—*Tu nos fecisti ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te*[1]—of its restless and broken grandeur, of its crying out for God. "Is it nothing to you, O ye that pass by?"

There is a story of a poor Korean woman

[1] Augustine, *Confessions*, I., 1. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it rest in Thee."

coming out of a country district to one of the towns and asking all she met to guide her to "the place where they heal the broken heart." She had heard that it could be done, and in this town, too, if she could find the place. And she did find it—it was a Baptist mission-station. Surely this is a parable of the Church in all the centuries—the one body with a promise for broken hearts: "Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." Is it not a call to realise more closely the mind that was in Him Who gave the promise?

There let us end for to-day—we have found the nature and purpose of a Christian Society, and we can sum it up in familiar words: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"; and, if we obey, we in our turn shall be able to speak of "the Lord working with us, and confirming the word with the signs following."